The CNN Effect: Mass Media and Humanitarian Aid

Jared Bredeson

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_____
Clifford W. Kelly, Ph.D.
Thesis Chair

_____
Douglas Mann, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Amy Bonebright, M.A.
Committee Member

_____
James H. Nutter, D.A.
Honors Director

_____
Date

Abstract

Mass media have great power and great responsibility. The CNN Effect states that when news media broadcast emotionally driven stories of human crisis, this provokes a major response by domestic audiences and political elites. This power to influence public policy can help save people from danger and even death. Acts of massive genocide were committed in Rwanda and Darfur. Because the media failed to act quickly and report accurately on these situations, many people lost their lives due to slow international reaction. News media need to learn from these tragic mistakes and never let genocide go on unnoticed by those who have the power to stop it.

The CNN Effect: Mass Media and Humanitarian Aid

Mass media have an enormous influence over the public. From advertising to news broadcasts to nightly sitcoms, people are continuously bombarded with opinions and information (Cohen, Gunther, Talor & Tsfati, 2010). Many do not realize the impact media have on their lives. Ask any teenager how much they are influenced by mass media and more often than not they will claim that media have no effect over them. Working in mass media gives a person a very strong, yet often times unnoticed, power over the public. If abused, communicating false or inaccurate information can harm or literally kill thousands of people. Such may well have been the case in Rwanda and Darfur.

This thesis will examine the power of media in directing humanitarian aid when genocide in Rwanda and Darfur was largely ignored by the international news media. This mistake quite possibly cost many innocent people their lives. Mass media providers have a responsibility to accurately report important information rather than ignore or disregard it. Mass media have a significant ability to affect humanitarian aid provided to countries in need; yet in instances of genocide in Africa, the media have shied away from reporting the situation, negatively affecting national awareness. This mistake should not be repeated again.

CNN Effect Introduction

The main theory discussed in this thesis will be the "CNN Effect." This theory, proposed by Piers Robinson, the Senior Lecturer in International Politics at the University of Manchester and author of *The CNN Effect: the Myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention* (2002), states that compelling television images, especially those

in humanitarian crisis, cause U.S. policymakers to intervene in a situation when that situation would normally not be in the interest of the U.S. It displays the important power of the mass media.

In WWII, mass media became an important part of the war efforts. The war could be easily broadcast throughout the world and major television broadcast companies quickly became forefront runners of broadcasting. Throughout subsequent wars, the Cold War, Vietnam, Gulf War, and other conflicts, broadcast companies NBC, BBC, and CNN became some of the most influential broadcasters of the war activities (Gilboa, 2005). Senior political officials began to recognize how their policies were affected by the mass media. Former Secretary of State James Barker III wrote, "In Iraq, Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, and Chechnya, among others, the real-time coverage of conflict by the electronic media have served to create a powerful new imperative for prompt action that was not present in less frenetic [times]" (cited in Gilboa, 2005, p. 103).

The theory states that television coverage can have three different effects on humanitarian military interventions. The first effect is self-titled the "CNN Effect," where images of suffering push governments into intervention; the second is the "body bags effect," where images of casualties pull governments away; the final effect is the "bullying effect," where the use of excessive force risks draining away public support for intervention (Gilboa, 2005, pp. 29-30). As will be shown, despite the great ability the media have to affect political power, it failed in its duty in the genocide of Rwanda and Darfur.

Although there are many other ways in which policy makers are affected, this thesis takes a more limited view of the CNN Effect theory and only includes news media.

It is still recognized that advertisements, entertainment, and other areas of interest can change a person's beliefs. This thesis follows the same line of reasoning as Robinson in his book *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News , Foreign Policy and Intervention*: "The focus is on one variable, the media, which are widely understood to play an important role in influencing US-led intervention. Understanding what motivates the US to act is central to understanding the CNN Effect because the majority of forcible interventions have occurred under the command and leadership of the US" (2002, p. 1).

Rwanda Introduction

The conflict in Rwanda had been slowly building since the mid-1900s between two people groups, the Hutu and Tutsis. Genocide began in 1959 when the Hutu government militia killed 20,000 Tutsis (Destexhe, Keane, & Fergal, 2011). Intermittent fighting and killing continued until April of 1994 when the president of the Hutu militia was shot down in a jet. Massacre started the next day with 8,000 to 10,000 Rwandans being killed each day (Dallaire, & Bearsly 2003). The international media failed here in informing the world of the massive genocide. Reporter Tom Giles (2007) described the slow response:

> For nearly three weeks in April, after its first days had passed, the story of one of the twentieth century's worst crimes had failed – in an age of global satellite broadcasting – to make the top of the TV news bulletins. (p. 236)

It took the news media several weeks to begin circulating the story of the genocide in Rwanda. Even then the stories were scarce and often times overshadowed by stories of happenings in Bosnia (Chaon, 2007). News sources also had a hard time getting reporters into Rwanda due to the highly dangerous atmosphere. For most of April, there were only

10-15 reporters in the whole country (Kawczynska, 2009). The world was generally kept in darkness about the massacre in Rwanda as producers decided the happenings were not important enough to show audiences. Richard Dowden (2007), director of the Royal African Society said:

> Rwanda simply wasn't important enough. To British editors, it was a small country far away in a continent that rarely hit the headlines. The words Hutu and Tutsi sounded funny, hardly names that ambitious news editor or desk officer would want to draw to the attention of a busy boss and claim that they were of immediate and vital importance. On top of this, many reporters had trouble fully understanding the situation and accurately getting the story out of the country due to poor technology. (p. 251)

Many lives could have been saved if the mass media would have done more during the situation. Lieutenant-General Romeo Dallaire said during the crisis that "I felt that one good journalist on the ground was worth a battalion of troops because I realized they could bring pressure to bear" (Dallaire, 2007, p. 16). The CNN Effect states that political members would have taken a larger step to prevent the crisis if the media would have more greatly emphasized the genocide. When the situation began settling down in the late 1990s, over one million people were victims of the situation (Des Forges, 1999). National political figures claimed that they would never let something like this happen again. In a speech given by Rwanda President Paul Kagame at the general assembly of the United Nations (2005), the president said:

> Never again should the international community's response to these crimes be found wanting. Let us resolve to take collective action in a timely and decisive

> manner. Let us also commit to put in place early warning mechanisms and ensure that preventive interventions are the rule rather than the exception. (pp. 5-6)

Darfur Introduction

No less than 10 years later, however, in 2003 another massive genocide occurred less than 1000 miles away, in nearby Sudan (Costello, 2009). The situation surrounding this second act of massive genocide started in much the same way. Various people groups were fighting for land and representation within the country. In February of 2003, the *janjaweed* began burning villages and massacring villagers (Mitchell, 2008). Despite the media and politicians claiming they would never let another act of atrocity go unnoticed again, the news media once again failed at noticing the story until later in the year (Zagorski, 2009). When the genocide finally gained attention from the news media, reporters still had trouble accessing Sudan as the government was making it near impossible to enter the country. Bacon (2004) describes the tight security as the "Sudanese authorities rapidly erected an obstacle course for gaining access to Darfur. It can take more than six weeks to get a visa for Sudan, and sometimes the government won't grant them at all" (p. 1). The story did not become a hot topic until September of 2004 when United States Secretary of State, Colin Powell, came out and called the issue in Sudan, "genocide" (Zagorski, 2009, p. 2). Up until this point, the situation had not been referred to in that way. This caused a media frenzy until December of that year when the tsunami hit Asia and Darfur was immediately forgotten about: "Darfur instantly vanished from the TV screens and the pages of newspapers. The media could handle only one emotion-laden story at a time, not two, and the tsunami was much more politically correct than Darfur" (Prunier, 2005, p. 128).

The situation was essentially put on the back burner until 2006 until it began to receive endorsement from celebrities such as George Clooney (Haeri, 2008). It is interesting to note however, that the major news broadcasting stations all overshadowed Darfur throughout the years with local stories such as the infamous "runaway bride" or the Michael Jackson trials (Kawczynska, 2009).

The CNN Effect

Defining the CNN Effect

Examining the CNN Effect theory will reveal that swifter, more accurate media coverage of the instances of genocide would have caused policy makers to step in and stop the acts of inhumanity faster. Ever since World War II, the media have been lazy or reluctant in reporting on genocide. *New York Times* journalist Nicholas Christof has this to say about media:

> We had done a lazy job covering genocide. During the Second World War *New York Times* published 24,000 front-page stories during the Holocaust and of these six on front page described attacks on Jews. We have this long tradition of ignoring genocide as it happens and years later we say how we could not have given more coverage. (Freedman, 2008)

There are many opinions as to how the CNN Effect works and how effective media really are at changing the actions of policy makers. This thesis will show that media do have an effect on policy makers and that had news media acted sooner, policy makers could have done more to help prevent mass genocide.

The CNN Effect theorizes that when news media broadcast emotionally driven stories of human crisis, this provokes a major response by domestic audiences and

political elites (Robinson, 1999). The theory got its name from the powerhouse broadcast company, CNN, that was the leader in broadcasting global, real-world events during the 1980s. Images of major events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War, and the Gulf War were captivating audiences across the world. Broadcast news companies became so involved in covering these events that Former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali complained, "CNN is the sixteenth member of the Security Council" (Gilboa, 2005, p. 28).

Along with this increase in broadcasting, researchers wondered how it was affecting political figures and their decisions on major policies. Now that policy maker's decisions were being broadcast to the entire world, they had more accountability, and were made aware of events that before might have never concerned them. A quote in Gilboa's research (2005) describes the new change in policymaking:

> It suggests that when CNN floods the airwaves with news of a foreign crisis, policymakers have no choice but to redirect their attention to the crisis at hand. It also suggests that crisis coverage evokes an emotional outcry from the public to 'do something' about the latest incident, forcing political leaders to change course or risk unpopularity. (p. 29)

This emphasizes the relationship between news, the public, and policymakers. When the public is emotionally affected by the news, they will demand for something to be done. Because politicians are the voice of the people, they should listen to their communities and change policy where needed.

Because politics is so intricate and complicated, not everyone agrees with the straightforwardness of the CNN Effect. It is easy to see how politics is not all

straightforward as everyone has an agenda and the public body simply does not sway some policymakers. Although there may be some abnormal cases, the overall idea of media effecting people and politics is generally sound. Gilboa provides a number of refinements to the CNN Effect proposed by various researchers.

One such refinement was a policy-media interaction model "that predicts that media influence is likely to occur when policy is uncertain and media coverage is critically framed and empathizes with suffering people" (Gilboa, 2005, p. 34). He says that when policy is very certain, media have little power to change that policy (Gilboa, 2005). An interesting case study he provided was during the Clinton administration in Bosnia and Kosovo:

> U.S. policy to defend the Gorazde "safe area" in Bosnia was influenced by the media because Clinton's policy was uncertain and the media strongly criticized him. In the Kosovo case, however, Clinton's air-war policy was clear, and consequently the media failed to expand the operation to include ground troops. (Gilboa, 2005, p. 36)

This is a perfect example of how media can affect policy. It cannot be expected that a firm-set policy will be changed with a simple news story, but when policy is still being experimented with, a large uprising against the policy should be a clue of it being a bad policy.

Rwanda Genocide

History

The first case that will be covered in this thesis is that of genocide in Rwanda.

The Republic of Rwanda is a small country located in eastern Africa. It is surrounded by Uganda to the north, Tanzania to the east, Burundi to the south and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the west. There is only one primary ethnic and linguistic people group in Rwanda, the Banyarwanda. Within this group, the people can be divided into three separate groups: the Hutu, The Tutsi, and the Twa. Because the people all share the same common history, language and culture, they can be called separate social groups, rather than tribes. The CIA World Factbook's (2011) latest census shows that the Hutu people compose 84% of the population, the Tutsi 15%, and the Twa 1%. To set up the scale of the tragedy that happened in this country it is important to know that traditionally, the Tutsi were the ruling class, while the Hutus and the Twa were more commonly agrarian. This elitism and distinction between classes was the beginning of a long, bloody atrocity in the country.

An important fact to point out is that from 1894 until independence in 1962, Rwanda was first a German colony, and then under Belgian control. While under the control of these two countries, the Tutsi were highly favored and treated as a superior race. The Belgians introduced identity cards that everyone in the country was required to carry, defining them by their social classification, Tutsi, Hutu, or Twa. The enormous favoritism towards the Tutsi people not only reinforced their feeling of elitism, but also exacerbated the feelings of the Hutus (Kawczynska, 2009). The fueling of hatred between the two social groups was not simply based upon ethnic or racial divisions, but on the stereotypes and support shown to one group over the other by the colonizers (Destexhe et al., 2011). Even though they were the same culturally, the title that was put on them with

negative connotations sparked anger by those who were being oppressed (Des Forges, 1999).

In 1957 a drastic change in power occurred. Nine Hutus published the *Hutu Manifesto,* a document expressing their anger with the Tutsi dominance. It described the problem in this way:

> First and foremost, the problem is one of political monopoly enjoyed by one particular race, the [Tutsi]: political monopoly that under existing structures, develops into social and economic monopoly, which in turn, because of de facto selection in education, becomes a monopoly that pigeonholes the [Hutu] as perpetual unskilled subordinates. (Kabanda, 2007, p. 63)

When the Belgians read this document, which was written by Hutu intellectuals, they quickly changed their preferences from the Tutsi to the now more intellectual Hutu. The uprising of Hutu power continued for the next few years and the Tutsi soon began to be described as *feudal colonists* (Destexe as cited in Kawczynska, 2009). As the Hutu power grew, they began to believe in holding all the power in Rwanda. In 1959, the Rwanda Revolution began. As the Hutus began reaching for power, they removed the Tutsis by whatever way possible. It is estimated that over 20,000 Tutsi were killed in this power struggle (Caplan, 2007) and 150,000 fled to nearby Burundi and Uganda (Destexhe et al., 2011). The majority of those who fled were the elite and well educated, as they were the main target of the Hutus. In 1962, the Hutus had overthrown the Belgian monarchy and established the Republic of Rwanda with the majority part of the Hutu Emancipation movement (PARMEHUTU). The new republic was headed by Gregoire Kayibanda, and under his regime, many educated and influential Tutsi and those previously in power

were persecuted (Kabanda, 2007). Kabanda (2007) goes on to say, “All influential Tutsi were arrested. Some were released after being mistreated, while other were executed without trial… this was the case for senior officials and leaders” (p. 69).

Persecution and small episodes of genocide continued throughout the next 30 years. It is estimated that by the mid-1960s over half of the Tutsi population lived outside of Rwanda (Des Forges, 1999). In the early 1990s a large number of Tutsi’s living in neighboring countries formed the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) in Uganda and demanded to be given their rights back by the Rwanda government. Instead of compromising, this demand created a renewed distrust and abhorrence between the Rwanda government and the Tutsi people. Under international pressure, the Hutu’s were forced to share the government with the RPF, but tensions were still high between the groups. Using media propaganda and many extremist radio stations, the Hutu people kept up the hatred for the Tutsi and continually called for the need to attack the Tutsi (Kawczynska, 2009). Tensions continued to rise to the boiling point, causing many human rights activists to warn of an impending disaster. In the early months of 1994, the tension was so strong that human rights activists began evacuating the country for fear of immanent massacre.

On April 6, 1994, the thin line keeping hell from breaking loose finally snapped. While coming in for a landing, an airplane carrying Rwanda President Juvenal Habyarimana and the Hutu president of Burundi Cyprien Ntaryamira was shot down, killing both presidents (Destexhe et al., 2011). Blame for the assassination was immediately put on the RPF, even though they claimed that Hutu extremists had planned the event with intent of blaming it on the Tutsi. Despite the conflicting claims, the Hutu

government jumped on the opportunity to immediately use this as a catalyst for eliminating every Tutsi in the country.

That very night the Rwanda military and Hutu militia began systematically setting out orders to kill any and every Tutsi that they could find. The next few days encapsulated widespread, massive genocide as the Hutus literally went door-to-door, killing all Tutsi, regardless of age or sex. It is estimated that 8,000 to 10,000 Rwandans were killed each day (Dallaire, 2003). The militia and military were also aided by a Hutu Power station RTLM that broadcast violent propaganda encouraging people to kill their Tutsi neighbors (Kawczynska, 2009). They were told that if they did not aid in this racial cleansing, they themselves would be killed. On April 8, the RPF launched a counter attack to stop the genocide of their people. Massive slaughter ensued. One reporter described the horrors that he saw:

> At one point, I turned my camera away to look at other activity on the road. By the time I panned back to the first spot, two or three men had been brought out and killed. You can see that on the footage. You can see them still being beaten. What is notable is that they weren't killed instantly; they were slowly beaten to death, tortured. When I focused my camera that second time, I could see two women among one pile of bodies. There must have been about eight bodies by then. (Hughes, 2007, p. 233)

It is hard to get an accurate number on how many people died during this time due to the vastness of the attacks, but one U.N. expert estimated that 800,000 Rwandans died between April and July of 1994 (Des Forges, 1999). Of that number, 507,000 were Tutsi, almost 75% of the entire Tutsi population (1999). The Rwandan government released

results in 2002 from the first census aimed at finding a number of people killed: "It found that 1,074,017 people – approximately one-seventh of the total population – were murdered, with Tutsis accounting for 94 percent of the victims" (Gendercide.org, 2002). Finally, in July of 1994, the RPF captured the capitol and forced the Hutu government to flee, ending the mass genocide. They set up an intermittent government and official mass killings began to decrease, although killings of Tutsis continued in many refugee camps.

Even though the major fighting was now over, the impact of the genocide on this country continues. Over half the population of the country was, in some way, affected by the genocide (UNHCR, 2000). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, it is estimated that over two million refugees had left Rwanda to take shelter in neighboring countries (cited in UNAMID Background, 2000). The conditions of the refugee camps along with the rampant AIDS epidemic caused even more deaths.

Political Response

The reason this humanitarian crisis is a case study for the CNN Effect in this thesis is because international governments failed to step in to help prevent the genocide until many months after the acts were committed. The United Nations had 2,500 military units inside of Rwanda before April 6, but they were forbidden to intervene in any way as this would violate their "monitoring mandate" (Destexhe et al., 2011). On April 21, ten Belgian soldiers were brutally tortured and killed while protecting Hutu prime minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana. After this horrific incident, the U.N. cut its forces from 2,500 to 250. Despite the climbing number of people being killed, the U.N. seemed to shy away from becoming involved in this conflict. A U.N. Security Council resolution released on the April 21, 1994 mentioned that they were:

> Appalled at the ensuing large-scale violence in Rwanda, which has resulted in the death of thousands of innocent civilians, including women and children, the displacement of a significant number of the Rwandese population, including those who sought refuge with UNAMIR, and the significant increase in refugees to neighboring countries. (p. 2)

Again on May 17, 1994 the Security Council says that they are “strongly condemning the ongoing violence in Rwanda and particularly condemning the very numerous killings of civilians which have taken place in Rwanda and the impunity with which armed individuals have been able to operate and continue operating therein” (p. 1). It should be noted that nowhere in these resolutions is the word “genocide” ever mentioned. The U.N. shied away from using this word as the mention of it would legally oblige them to "prevent and punish the perpetrators” (Destexhe et al., 2011, para. 29).

Finally, on June 8, 1994, a little over two months since the genocide began, the Security Council used the taboo word. They said that they recognized “reports indicating that acts of genocide have occurred in Rwanda” (p. 1). Finally, national policy makers were admitting to the humanitarian disaster that was happening right in front of them. The recognition of genocide was not a quick, magic fix-all, however. The U.N. resolves to send in extra troops, but countries cannot agree on who should pay the bill of sending military and supplying equipment. By late June, the United States also begins to describe the actions in Rwanda as genocide, yet delays its participation in arguments over the cost of providing heavy armored vehicles. On July 22, the U.N. Security Council agreed to send a deployment of French forces to help establish a “safe-zone” in south-west

Rwanda. Although, this was a step in the right direction, killings still occurred outside this small safe-zone until the RPF overthrew the Hutus and ended the conflict.

The CNN Effect states that mass media have an effect over policy makers. It argues that if the media shows horrific images and tells compelling stories of humanitarian disaster, policy makers will be forced to deal with the situation more effectively than if the event had not been covered (Robinson, 2002). The clear lack of effort by policy makers to quickly or effectively deal with the genocide in Rwanda strongly suggests that either mass media failed to adequately cover the story, or that policy makers function at their own pace, completely unaffected by the media (Jakobsen, 2000). The next section will look at the adequacy of media in covering the events in Rwanda, and how a faster response by the media would have created a faster response by policy makers.

The Role of Mass Media

Now that the history of the genocide has been detailed, the role, or lack thereof, of mass media at this time will be discussed. The CNN Effect states that mass media have an effect on policy makers (Robinson, 2002). If this is correct, then the massive scale of the genocide in Rwanda could have been lessened, or even prevented by policy makers who were influence by the public pressure brought on by adequate media coverage of the events in Rwanda. This section will look at the technological and logistical challenges faced by mass media at the time as well as discuss the “hate” media that provoked negative action.

Problems facing mass media. Media coverage of Rwanda was a challenge from the beginning. Safety of the journalists was the biggest deterrent against getting up-to-

date, accurate reports. Rwandan journalist Thomas Kamilindi (2007) describes the situation the best when he said:

> On 12 April 1994, all foreigners were evacuated. All international public servants, aid workers, journalists – they were all evacuated. The genocide began in earnest in those first two weeks and nobody knew anything about it. It was done in secrecy at a time when what we needed were a few courageous people to come and report on this country – this country, which, for many news organizations, didn't seem to exist. (p. 139)

The challenge here was that no reporters were willing to enter into a dangerous, closed country where they had the chance of being seriously injured or even killed. Because of the unstableness of the country, it was simply not safe for reporters to be in the area where militants were brutally murdering each other. Throughout the month of April only 10-15 reporters were in Rwanda at any given time (Kawczynska, 2009). Especially after the Bosnian troops were tortured and killed, it was unreasonable to ask a reporter to risk their life by being in the country.

Another problem reporters had to deal with was getting their stories out of Rwanda. Even though technology in the mid-1990s was capable of transmitting data over large distances, in the middle of Africa, this technology was sparse. Reporter Richard Dowden (2007) detailed the trouble with technology in Rwanda:

> It was also impossible to get the story without leaving Rwanda. Telephones did not work and mobile phones did not reach that far in those days. To send reports back to the newspapers meant going all the way back to Uganda, another day's journey on roads where you had to drive permanently in second gear. (p. 250)

This cannot be blamed on reporters as lack of effort. With better technology more information may have been able to come out of Rwanda sooner. Yet one more problem faced news companies when they did receive the stories: the audience.

News broadcasters were having a hard time making the troubles in Rwanda become top news (Thompson, 2007). South Africa was celebrating its first black president, Nelson Mandela, and this story took up much of the airwaves in the early stages of the Rwanda genocide (Giles 2007). People did not care about a small country in Africa that was experiencing what was, at the time, being inaccurately reported as tribal fighting. Reporter Anne Chaon (2007) puts it quite simply; she says, "reporters were there, pictures were available. Stories were filed. But if readers, if people you speak to do not want to listen, you can't force them. They can just turn the dial" (p. 165). It is true that you need an audience to keep your station running, but there has to come a time when an audience needs to be told what is happening, whether they like it or not.

> The editors and producers have the last word. If they decide that there is no audience to watch the mass killing they will not put it on air. If the audience is falling, then no wonder the directors do not want to show humanitarian crisis on TV and replace them with entertainment. (Gowing quoted in Kawczynska 2009, p. 33)

News broadcasters cannot always cater to the whimsical wishes of the public. When hundreds of thousands of people are being mercilessly slaughtered, people need to know and react accordingly.

One problem with the news reporting at this time can be blamed on the reporters themselves. When the stories first started trickling out of Rwanda, they were misinformed

and misleading (Thompson, 2007). Many reports described what was happening as "tribal fighting," and did not accurately depict the genocide that was really happening (Kawczynska, 2009). In fact, just like the U.N., reporters seemed to be avoiding using the word "genocide" to describe what was happening in Rwanda. It was easier to describe what was happening as chaos, rather than a systematic killing of a single people group. One reporter, Mark Doyle (2007) tells how he avoided using the word "genocide."

> Looking back through my reports, it appears I didn't use the word 'genocide' until 29 April, in a report filed from Nairobi that noted that the British aid agency Oxfam had described the killing in Rwanda as 'genocide'. But my reports had for some time been replete with references to the massacres of Tutsi civilians and moderate Hutus by government-backed militias. After that, as it became clear to me what was happening, I used the word genocide more often. (p. 154)

The majority of reporters were either uninformed about the history of the situation, or wanted to avoid responsibility of calling the event they were seeing genocide. In June 1994, the word Rwanda and genocide were only used 25 times in articles written about the events (Kawczynska, 2009, p. 35). By this time political leaders had begun using the term genocide more often as well, but one can only wonder what would have happened if news agencies had started reporting genocide earlier.

News agencies and mass media have big responsibilities in broadcasting accurate information that the public has no way of obtaining. One cannot demand that they be so perfect as to predict and prevent every humanitarian disaster, but it is reasonable to ask that when something does happen, it be accurately and quickly reported on. The amount of time it took for stories on Rwanda to begin accurately reporting what was happening

took far too long. If reporters had used the term “genocide” sooner, the policy makers around the world would have reacted sooner to stop the atrocity (Zagorski, 2009).

Darfur Genocide

History

The country of Sudan is the largest in the continent of Africa. It is situated directly below Egypt and is on the eastern edge of the Sahara desert. Within the country is a region called Darfur. This region is in the western corner of Sudan and is very drought-prone. Roughly the size of Texas, Darfur is made up of three states, Shamal Darfur, Gharb Darfur, and Janub Darfur. This area, before the crisis in Darfur began in 2003, was home to roughly six million people, mostly farmers and nomadic herders (Save Darfur, 2011). In this group of people, there are forty to eighty different ethnic groups. Broadly speaking, the various groups can be divided into Arab nomads and African farmers, although these groups have mixed and intermarried throughout the years (Mitchell, 2008). The majority of the people in Darfur are Arab Muslims and most villages are very multi-ethnic. Southern Darfur had a higher concentration of Christian Africans (Prunier, 2005). For years, these people have lived in a relatively peaceful coexistence with each other, until the conflict began in early spring of 2003.

In April 2003, two rebel movement groups rose up against the Darfur government in Khartoum, angered by the ongoing economic and political marginalization. The two groups were the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). The SLM began in the late 1980s when a drought forced the Arab nomads from North Darfur to move to South Darfur in order to find water and pasture. South Darfur was populated mostly by black African farmers. The Arab nomads formed

the SLM as a self-defense group to help defend themselves against attacks from the Arab militias supported by the Khartoum government (Save Darfur, 2011). In 2003, the group was an uneasy alliance between the Fur and Zaghawa tribes, which later split in 2005 due to a power struggle between the two tribes. African Muslims who helped President Omar al-Bashir stage a coup in 1989 founded the JEM. The group is mainly supported by the Zaghawa tribe (Mitchell, 2008).

With the uprising of these two groups, the Sudanese government responded quickly and violently to extinguish the rebellion. Although still adamantly denied by the Sudan government, it was reported that the government began supplying a local group of Arab militia with means to attack the rebelling tribes (Straus, 2005). The *janjaweed,* which roughly translates to "evil horsemen" (Prunier, 2005, p. 136), began raiding, looting, and setting fire to villages inhabited by ethnic groups from which the JEM and SLM received most of their support. This is known as the "scorched earth" campaign (Mitchell, 2008). Complete villages were burnt to the ground and the Darfur people were forced to flee to the neighboring country of Chad to try to escape the danger. In a short amount of time, the government militia burnt over 570 villages, damaged over 150 more and forced millions of people to flee their homes (Straus, 2005). CBN News reported that it is estimated that as many as 300,000 people lost their lives between 2003 and 2005 (2008) and an estimated 1.8 million civilians have been displaced since in the same time (Straus, 2005). The majority of those killed were the black "Africans" and Christians, while the main perpetrators of the killings were the government-backed "Arab" Muslim militia (Prunier, 2005). Many of these deaths were caused by the atrocious living situations the people were forced to live in. The refugee camps in Chad soon became

overfilled with people. Disease spread rapidly and food and water became increasingly hard to find. It is estimated that around 80% or more of the 300,000 deaths in Darfur are caused not by direct violence, but by the horrible living conditions (Degomme & Guha-Sapir, 2010).

Political Response

The crisis did not gain national attention until almost an entire year later when in 2004 the U.S. finally declared the situation "genocide," and the United Nations called it "crimes against humanity" and "war crimes" (CBN News, 2008). By now, 70,000 people had lost their lives from the *janjaweed* burning villages and killing innocent civilians (CBC News, 2008). The UN and U.S. attempted passing laws and sanctions against Sudan but nothing could stop the raging battle between militant groups (Kawczynska, 2009).

In 2006, one small step seemed to be made when the Sudan government signed a peace treaty with one faction of the SLM. However, this was after the SLM had split into two separate groups, and the other half of the SLM and the JEM still refused to sign the agreement. The Sudanese government has tried to sign peace treaties with the rest of the rebel groups, but since they claim to not be supporting the *janjaweed*, the peace treaties would essentially be worthless to abide by (Mitchell, 2008).

Various agencies have tried entering the country to provide peacekeepers and support to the suppressed militia groups, but the Sudanese government has made these attempts very difficult. In 2004, peacekeepers from the African Union were allowed to enter the country, yet they were quickly deterred by lack of supplies, funding, and extreme physical danger. To date, about 51 peacekeepers have died in Darfur from

attacks by the *janjaweed* (Mitchell, 2008). In January of 2008, the United Nations-African Union peacekeeping force (UNAMID) was allowed to enter the country and help the struggling African Union peacekeepers. The UN authorized around 26,000 troops to be deployed in the nation; however, as of June 2008 only around 9,000 were actually deployed (Mitchell, 2008). Even with the added military strength much more was needed to help the nearly 2.7 million internally displaced persons who live spread out over Darfur. Along with this number, there is an estimated 300,000 still living in refugee camps in Chad (Save Darfur, 2011). The UN predicted that about 4.7 million, out of the population of roughly 6 million, people in Darfur were affected by this crisis (Save Darfur, 2011).

Today, fighting still continues between the rebel movement and the government militia. Raiding and violence still abound in the widely un-ruled region. Children and women are most vulnerable. The main problem in the area is violence and rape. Because of the lack of water, the people must travel great distances to retrieve water, making them prime targets for violent militia. Estimates range from 200,000 to 400,000 deaths that are caused from this tragedy, and there seems to be no end in sight for the dilapidated nation (UNAMID, 2011).

This crisis is a very complex and deeply rooted problem that has no “quick-fix” solution. However, more things could be done for the situation. Awareness of the continuing violence in Darfur is very low, and the problem must be once again brought to the attention of the United States public. The European Sudanese Public Affairs Council stated, “The international media’s coverage of the Darfur conflict has been self-evidently lackluster. The very dynamics of the conflict has not even been adequately analyzed or

reported" (cited in Hoile, 2009, p. 18). George Clooney was one of the very first celebrity figures to bring this crisis to the eyes of the US public (Haeri, 2008). He is a very strong and vocal voice for the dying and oppressed of Darfur.

The Role of Mass Media

Many of the same problems plaguing reporters in 1994 happened during the Darfur genocide as well. Safety and misunderstanding the situation were big factors in a lack of steady reporting of the mass genocide during the early stages (Kawczynska, 2009). There were however some improvements made by reporters and news agencies.

Problems facing mass media. Once again, gaining access to the country was a major problem for reporters. Not only was it dangerous, but the Sudan government hindered access as much as possible (Thompson, 2007). President Omar el-Bashir made it nearly impossible for journalists to enter the country. Travel permits that were given out were only valid for three days, making it nearly impossible for reporters to get into the country and find their story (Kawczynska, 2009). The government wanted to keep as much information as it could from leaking out of the country. Although they knew that they could not keep people silent forever, their attempts to slow the release of information greatly helped in the continuing genocide.

Another problem that plagued news services the same as it did in Rwanda was a lack of general interest in another "tribal war" happening in the wilderness of Africa. News organizations were far more interested in talking about local affairs or "entertainment" new rather than people dying in a continent far away. In 2004, according to a report cited by Allan Thompson (2007), the three major networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS) devoted a combined 26 minutes of airtime to the fighting in Sudan (p. 437). "ABC

devoted 18 minutes to Darfur coverage, NBC 5 and CBS only 3" (Thompson, 2007, p.437). To contrast, the troubles of design guru Martha Stewart gained 130 minutes of national coverage (Thomson, 2007, p. 437). This shows not only the shallowness of the American public, but also the huge failure in responsibility from the news network's standpoint to report on humanitarian disasters.

A statement by Thompson (2007) shows how Darfur was easily lost in the wake of many popular "pop-culture" events happening during the Darfur genocide:

> A quantitative monitoring of all news segments aired in June 2005 on ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, FoxNews and MSNBC demonstrated that coverage of Darfur was overshadowed by reporting on the so-called 'runaway bride' (the Georgia woman who drove across the country and concocted a fake kidnapping to escape her wedding in April 2005), the Michael Jackson trial and Tom Cruise's new movie and relationship with actress Katie Holmes. (p. 437)

It is sad to see the Darfur genocide be eclipsed by so many trivial stories. Thompson reported that out of roughly 24,900 minutes of news programs in 2004, only 26 minutes were devoted to Darfur. Contrast this to the 130 minutes of coverage on the Martha Stewart legal case and you can see where the interests of the news media lay (para. 16). Essentially, news services turned a blind eye to the vastness of the disaster in Darfur. It is hard to say if this was due to a lack of information to report on, or a decision by directors to report on more publically interesting events at home. Either way, this is a huge flaw in news broadcasting that cannot be left unattended for future genocide events.

Improvements in mass media. Not all of the problems that happened during Rwanda were repeated again during Darfur. Technology had improved and reporters

were better able to get their stories out of the country. Video games were even made to spread awareness of what was happening in refugee camps during the Darfur genocide. A special Google Earth map of Darfur was created allowing people to get a close look at living conditions in refugee camps. These various ways of raising awareness about the event were not available during Rwanda, and greatly aided in the effort to get people's attention. Celebrities like George Clooney were also instrumental in raising awareness.

In 2006, Clooney addressed the UN Security Council and said if the Sudan government refused to address the situation:

> You will simply need men with shovels and bleached white linen and headstones. In many ways it's unfair, but it is, nevertheless, true that this genocide will be on your watch. How you deal with it will be your legacy, your Rwanda, your Cambodia, your Auschwitz. (De Waal, 2007, p. 1043)

Clooney's involvement with publicizing the Darfur genocide is entirely commendable, and his work moved many people and political figures into action. It must be pointed out, however, that this was up to three years after the genocide began. We cannot hold Clooney accountable for discovering the genocide and reporting on it to the world when it first began, this responsibility falls into the hands of the news media. Clooney was a great force in making the event known after years of being ignored, but more should have been done on behalf of media to prevent the genocide from reaching the level that it did.

The CNN Effect in Rwanda and Darfur

Because the CNN Effect has such a broad definition, it can be pointed out that the theory may be perceived as inconsistent. The policy-media interaction model is one of the

best ways to narrow down the theory into a manageable size. A conclusion can now be made about how the CNN Effect worked in Rwanda and Darfur.

In both of these cases, media attention failed to alert the public of the magnitude of genocide happening in the countries; in fact, the word “genocide” was not even used during the first few months. Because the events were being portrayed as “chaos” or “tribal wars” people did not pay attention because there was no emotional connection to a “small” civil war happening on the other side of the world. The world did not begin to notice the magnitude of the events until the word “genocide” began to be used (Zagorski, 2009). The public quickly found out that one social group of people was quickly being wiped out from existence.

In Rwanda, the majority of later news reports focused on the refugees and the camps they lived in. U.S. policy was quickly changed to send aid to these people when the public finally took notice. In Darfur, the public began understanding what was really happening when celebrities like George Clooney began informing people of the genocide. Darfur had a stronger media presence in the end stages of the genocide than Rwanda did, but both countries did not receive enough. Many people suffered and died because the events were either not broadcast at all, or were overpowered by stories of other events:

> There is a reason why Darfur is called by some journalists and politicians “another Rwanda”. After the Second World War, the world said “never again” and the genocide in Rwanda took place. After this genocide, the people again promised themselves “never again” and now after 10 years of tragedy in Rwanda, the same thing happened in Darfur. (Kawczynska, 2009, p. 80)

If media had broadcast events earlier and harder, it is safe to say that policy makers, who at the time did not have firm-set policies, would have intervened more readily.

There can be no doubt that media affects people each and every day. Turn on the TV, listen to the radio in the car, read a blog post online, it all influences you either in a positive or in a negative way. Mass media have a huge power over the public; they can form the public into whatever they want. Communist nations use propaganda to brainwash their citizens to believe preposterous things. American advertising uses images of skinny models to tell girls what they need to look like. It is all around us. Because mass media have such great power, it also has a large responsibility.

When large humanitarian crises happen, such as genocide, the media need to be there and show people what is happening in effort to stop it. There will always be challenges, but we can learn from the past and not repeat the same mistakes. News services need to not be afraid of pushing a popular story out of the radar to cover crisis events. Media are the first line of defense. They should be the first in the country, the first to accurately report what is happening, and to actively push for global aid. If all agencies were willing to do this, there should never be an excuse for letting hundreds of thousands of people be slaughtered. Media have power; when used wisely, they can change the world.

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